
UNITY of FAITH

(EINIGKEIT IM GLAUBEN)

Essay given by Dr. Franz Pieper at
the 12th convention of the Ev.
Lutheran Synodical Conference
held at Milwaukee, August 8-14,
1888.

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Translator's note:

In a casual conversation Prof. Kurt Marquart of Ft. Wayne mentioned that Dr. Franz Pieper, in his Synodical Conference essay of 1888 on Einigkeit im Glauben, made some points that are relevant to the Missouri Synod's present discussion on church fellowship. A request to Dr. August Suelflow of Concordia Historical Institute in St. Louis for a spare copy of the 1888 proceedings, brought both the copy and the request that it be translated. The goal was to remain faithful to Pieper--the major responsibility--but to have him "talk English." This dual goal was challenging, frustrating, and at times well nigh impossible. My thanks to Rev. Lando Otto, my brother in the flesh and in the Lord, for his critical reading of the translation and his many valuable suggestions. My long-suffering wife, Etta, did the typing and the checking and the re-typing.

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Dr. Pieper's introductory comments:

It is generally agreed that there should be unity in the Christian church. Everyone complains about the divisions in the church. In all ages, and especially more recently, there have been energetic efforts to effect unity. We would be happy about this effort and would count our day as opportune for it if it were not for the fact that a closer look shows that most efforts towards unity are made in total ignorance regarding the nature of Christian unity. In this matter the devil has succeeded in effecting widespread confusion. Man looks for every kind of unity except the correct one which God desires. For that reason, man's efforts fail and those who seek genuine unity are labelled enemies of all unity while those who destroy true unity are praised as promoters of it.

By God's grace we know the correct, Christian, God-pleasing unity, the unity of faith. The following theses are presented to remind us of it and to encourage us in its preservation. The theses are as follows:

I

Unity of faith is agreement in all articles of Christian doctrine as revealed in Holy Scripture.

II

This unity of faith is possible because all articles of Christian doctrine are clearly revealed in Holy Scripture.

III

God desires this unity of faith because He both commands the acceptance in faith of His entire revelation and stoutly forbids every deviation therefrom.

IV

The necessary outward testimony of the unity of faith consists in this that those who stand in the unity of faith profess each other to be brethren in the faith.

V

Those who stand in the unity of faith, recognizing this unity as a glorious blessing of God's grace, should diligently seek to nurture and preserve it.

THESIS I

We understand unity of faith to be agreement in all articles of Christian doctrine which are revealed in Holy Scripture.

Thesis I expresses what we Lutherans understand under the concept of God-pleasing unity of faith. The detailed Scriptural support of this definition as the correct one will be given later (especially Thesis III).

It is to be noted that Thesis I does not answer the question regarding the bare minimum of God's revealed truth that is necessary for a person to come to saving faith and to be sustained therein. We Lutherans agree that there are true Christians, children of God, also in erring fellowships such as the Reformed Church, the reformed sects, and the Roman Church, which do not teach all articles of the revealed doctrine in conformity with the Word of God. These children of God are one with us in the actual foundation of faith, namely, the article on justification. Together with us they believe that they are justified and saved alone by grace for Christ's sake. Without this faith no one can be a Christian. Therefore, even God's children under the papacy have this faith. The papacy as such not only rejects the article of justification but also specifically curses this foundation on which every true Christian stands and thereby reveals itself as the anti-Christ. But as Luther frequently tells us, also in the papacy, for example, the text of the Epistles and Gospels is still being read. When some poor soul there hears the Word of Scripture, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" then he, through the working of the Holy Ghost, accepts this word from God, despite the blasphemies of the papistical priest who praises Mary and the saints as saviors. We Lutherans, therefore, insist that the Lutheran Church is the orthodox one because she has the complete Word of God clean and pure; but we do not declare the Lutheran Church to be the alone saving one. We do not claim that children of God are born only in the Lutheran Church. Rather we acknowledge that there are Christians where the essentials of the Word of God are to be found. As Luther comments on Galatians 1:2, "Where Word and sacrament remain in their vital points, there also is a Holy Church." When someone then poses the question, Is it not possible that also those have faith and are saved who err in one or the other articles of the doctrine revealed in the Word of God? Then we answer with an emphatic "Yes!" There are Christians who err out of weakness. There are such also in the orthodox church. Also in the Lutheran Church there are weak and erring Christians who have not attained the correct understanding of Christian doctrine in all its articles or who at least temporarily have erred in this or that article. We do not immediately declare such to be non-Christians, nor do we deal with them as such.

But this acknowledgment, that there are Christians who err in some articles of Christian doctrine, cannot induce us to define the unity of faith in any other way than has been done in Thesis I. We are speaking of the unity of faith as regards its nature according to God's will. And that is agreement not only in several but in all articles of Christian doctrine.

It is in that way that the Lutheran Church has conceived of the God-desired unity of faith. In Article VII of the Augsburg Confession, it defines the "true unity of the Christian church" as being found there where "the Gospel is preached in its purity and the Holy Sacraments are administered according

to the Gospel." The Lutheran Church confesses in Article X of the Formula of Concord (Tappert, p. 493-494): "We believe, teach, and confess that no church should condemn another because it has fewer or more external ceremonies not commanded by God, as long as there is mutual agreement in doctrine and in all its articles as well as in the right use of the Holy Sacraments...." Here our church declares that it understands the correct unity of faith as consisting in agreement "in doctrine and in all its articles" and not merely in some of them. At the conclusion of Article XI of the Formula of Concord, our church asserts that it has a great desire and love for unity and strives to promote it, but it must be such a unity and harmony that "will not violate God's honor, that will not detract anything from the divine truth of the holy Gospel, that will not give place to the smallest error...."

This declaration concerning the true Christian unity was repeated by the Synodical Conference in its Denkschrift of 1871. On page 46 of that publication, the words of Article X of the Formula of Concord are cited as a description of true unity.

In support of the fact that the Lutheran Church understands the God-desired unity as agreement in all articles of Christian doctrine, this can also be said. Although the Lutheran Church concedes that there are true Christians to be found among the heterodox, yet it has consistently refused to foster church fellowship with the heterodox in order not to give a false idea regarding church unity as if agreement in all articles were not necessary, as if it were not necessary to accept God's Word in its entirety.

That this is the Lutheran Church's understanding of unity is apparent also in the manner in which it deals with the erring and the weak within its own fellowship. It does not throw these overboard; that would be dreadful. But it also does not say, "It makes no difference if someone errs in this or that doctrine." To the contrary, it deals with the weak as did the Apostle Paul according to 1 Thess. 3:10. With all patience and love it seeks to supply what is lacking in faith through instruction in God's Word. Thus it always keeps in mind that the God-desired unity consists of agreement in all articles of Christian doctrine.

The Lutheran Church ultimately distinguishes clearly between heterodox and orthodox churches. Such churches which do not teach all articles of Christian doctrine in harmony with the Word of God it calls contaminated or heterodox churches. On the other hand, those churches which hold to the correct doctrine in all articles it calls orthodox. Why does the Lutheran Church hold to these designations which are so offensive to our time? Because it is convinced that it is God's earnest will and command that in the church His entire Word be accepted and hold sway. Where that is the case, the church has the form it should have according to God's will. Such a church, therefore, validly carries the name "orthodox." Where that is not the case, there is a great deficiency and serious sin. Such a fellowship in which this deficiency, this sin, is apparent, is properly called a heterodox or corrupted church or sect. The stance towards God's Word determines the character of a church fellowship. The church is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, that is, upon God's revealed Word. Now, when a fellowship has completely abandoned this foundation peculiar to the church, it no longer confesses the essentials of God's Word, with the result that in this fellowship, according to its confession, saving faith in Christ no longer can be effected. This fellowship is then a body standing

outside the church. For example, the Apology states that those who no longer confess the Holy Trinity are outside the church of Christ. A fellowship which still holds to the chief articles of Christian doctrine but rejects some clearly revealed articles, is a sect. On the other hand, a fellowship which accepts and confesses all articles of Christian doctrine is an orthodox fellowship, a fellowship as it ought to be.

In our discussion of the unity of faith we turn our critical attention to those who feel that some articles of Christian doctrine are not necessary to true church unity. This unionistic attitude is quite widespread in the church, yes, one might say that it has become a devastating flood which has inundated almost everything. The Union as it is found in Prussia and other areas of Germany, is built on this basic principle that agreement in the articles which are in dispute between Lutherans and Reformed are not essential to the unity of faith. The unionistic attitude extends far beyond the boundaries of the governmentally controlled Union. The entire modern theology is unionistic. It declares as an exaggeration of doctrinal unity the requirement that there be agreement in all articles. The Reformed sects in our country speak of "orthodox" teachers and fellowships but understand thereby those who accept some basic doctrines such as inspiration, the deity of Christ, and the necessity of conversion. They abandon other clear doctrines of the Word of God. The well-known Evangelical Alliance which was organized in London in 1846 rests on this same principle. It does not require of its members agreement in all doctrines of God's Word but is satisfied with these nine: 1. The trinity. 2. Original sin. 3. The deity of Christ. 4. Justification by faith. 5. The binding character of the two sacraments. 6. The resurrection of the body. 7. The final judgment. 8. The eternal bliss of the righteous. 9. The eternal damnation of the ungodly.

Among the church bodies bearing the name Lutheran in the United States, it is especially the General Synod that does not require agreement in all articles of Christian doctrine. In fact, it requires acceptance of the Augsburg Confession only with respect to the "fundamental articles." Oneness in doctrine is not the goal but rather oneness in work, ceremonies, and the like.

To be sure, a distinction needs to be made between the various articles of faith revealed in Holy Scripture. There are doctrines which every Christian must know and believe without whose knowledge and acceptance saving faith cannot exist. On the other hand, there are doctrines which one, in weakness, may not know or regarding which he may even harbor error and yet remain a Christian. This distinction is very important in answering the question as to who can be a Christian. But that question has no place at this point. Here we are considering the nature of unity according to God's will. Regarding that God the Lord says that all doctrines revealed in God's Word should be accepted by all. If we wanted to define unity of faith other than as given in Thesis I and began to make a choice between the various Scripture-revealed articles of faith, then we would be on shaky ground indeed. There would no longer be any restraint whatsoever and all distinctions between fundamental and non-fundamental doctrines would no longer be of any help. One could no longer say who is one with us and who is not.

At this point the following questions might be asked:

What is our position toward those who are true Christians within heterodox fellowships? Is it sufficient that we simply acknowledge the fact that there are Christians in such fellowships? Or should we not give expression to this conviction in our outward conduct? We conduct ourselves, it appears, toward the erring as toward the children of the world.

We already distinguish between erring fellowships and the children of the world when we acknowledge that there can be true Christians among the former.

Furthermore, when we meet with the erring we seek to instruct them. That is the valid striving for oneness in faith. However, we cannot practice church fellowship with them. For thereby we would be approving their errors and partaking of the sins of others. The refusal of church fellowship in that case would not show a lack of love. To the contrary, it is the highest demonstration of love to seek to convince the erring regarding their errors. Some will thus be gained. Love demonstrates itself in the refutation of the errorists, not through indifference toward them. This needs to be noted. We dare not say, "We are unable to come to an agreement with regard to this or that article of faith, but we nevertheless wish to be Christian brethren." It is simply impossible to practice fellowship with the Christians in the sects because we do not know who the Christians are among the errorists; they are hidden from us. They present themselves to us not as Christians but as errorists. As long as one pulls in the same harness with an errorist, we cannot recognize him as a brother. These are two different questions: (1) Who is a member of the invisible church, that is, a true Christian who sincerely believes in Jesus Christ? And (2), whom must I acknowledge as an orthodox Christian so that I can establish church fellowship with him? Here I must determine that he together with me submits to the total Word of God. Only then can I recognize him as a brother in the faith.

We know, of course, that there are hypocrites also in the true visible church. However, we must view as Christians all those who profess the Christian doctrine and lead a godly life. Love requires that. But love does not require that we declare as Christians all who are in heterodox fellowships. They do not confess the true Christian doctrine. Love requires only that we acknowledge: There are Christians among you.

In an effort to justify unionism, some point to the distinction between subjective and objective faith. It is claimed that both are not necessary. That is, what is taught in God's Word (objective faith) need not all be known and believed (subjective faith) by an individual Christian. If only, so this line of reasoning has it, a person is honestly and sincerely convinced in his conscience with regard to what he accepts, then he is a Christian and a brother and we are one in faith.

But when the question is asked which of these two aspects of faith, subjective or objective, is the important one in this connection, our answer is this: Both are important and cannot be separated. One is dealing with doctrines which are revealed in God's Word (objective faith) and these need to be accepted not only outwardly with the understanding but by an inner act (subjective faith).

We must also be clear on whether the definition of thesis I collides with the statements of our church since the "we" of the thesis includes the entire Lutheran church. When we look at confessional statements of our church, such as Article 7 of the Augsburg Confession, we find that what is necessary to true unity is confined to the Gospel and the sacraments. The dogmatists are in agreement therewith. Quenstedt, for example, says that strictly speaking doctrines of faith do not include moral commandments, rules, narratives, and so forth.

Our church, therefore, does not here speak of all doctrines but rather of the doctrines of the Gospel, of faith. If in this thesis all doctrines were meant, also those pertaining to the law, then the concept of this thesis as to what is sufficient for unity would not agree with the Augustana. It is to be understood that also in the thesis only the Gospel is meant. When we speak of the "articles of the Christian doctrine" we mean the revelation and preaching of Christ--Christus revelatus, Christus praedicatus. The law does not come into consideration here. The foundation upon which the Christian church is built is Christ, the Gospel. The law certainly is not peculiar to the Christian church but is common to all people. If a person would know the entire law and also stand under its operation, he still has nothing of that which makes a sinner a Christian and a believing child of God. The law does not make the church, and the law also does not make the church one. Only the Gospel does that. For that reason, the law does not belong in a definition of Christian unity or the unity of faith.

Perhaps one interjects at this point: How is it with the law? Is that left up to people's discretion? Are we required to acknowledge as a brother in the faith someone who, for example, rejects the 7th Commandment but at the same time insists that he accepts the doctrines of the Gospel? -- The law is clear to human reason and is acknowledged by human reason. In Scripture God has merely polished up the mirror of the law. Therefore, to someone who rejects items of the law we can properly say: How can you accept the doctrines of the Gospel and belong to the church when you do not even accept the law which even simple reason understands? Further, when someone does not wish to accept, for example, the doctrines regarding sin, the sinfulness of mankind, etc., which are law but are also known in our confessional writings, of such a one we would surely know that he could not be one with us in faith. No one can accept and confess the doctrine of Christ truthfully and at the same time teach that basically we do not need a Savior. The same is true with regard to other doctrines whose rejection is equivalent to a rejection of specific articles of the Gospel. Thus, the Pelagians, for example, are excluded from the Lutheran church and fellowship of faith with them is rejected. Therefore, we must require of every one who insists that he is one with us in faith that he submit to every word of God. After all, that is the foundation of the Christian faith that one is obedient to God's Word. That includes also the law since it is clearly and unequivocally revealed in Scripture. When someone refuses to accept the validity of the clear, spoken will of God, then we must tell him that he does not yet stand on the same ground with us. Therefore, acceptance of the law is a necessary prerequisite to the unity of faith even though the law does not belong to faith nor to a definition of faith. When we say that we believe the law we are using the word "believe" in a completely different sense than when we speak of Christian faith. The expression "article of faith" designates a specific concept, namely, the doctrines of the Gospel as opposed to law.

Thus far it has been stressed that we require agreement in all articles of Christian doctrine. But at the same time we dare not include more in the

essence of unity of faith than agreement in all articles of the doctrine. We must allow liberty in that which is not a clear doctrine of the Word of God; for that we dare not demand agreement.

We dare not require agreement in so-called theological problems, that is, in questions which are not answered in God's Word. That would be demanding too much. This is already apparent in the concept of faith. Faith takes place only over against God's revelation. Where there is no Word of God, there can be no faith.

In addition, we dare not require as belonging to the essence of unity of faith agreement in church practices, ceremonies, ecclesiastical organizations, and similar things. Why? Because they are left open in God's Word. What we are to preach is given us in God's Word, namely, the total Word of God and that clean and clear. But the place, time, and form of a church service lies within the freedom of every Christian congregation. We find in God's Word no regulations prescribing one, two, or three hymns before the sermon, whether the absolution is placed at the beginning of the service or after the sermon, whether the church service is a so-called liturgical service, or whether the pastor sings or speaks the liturgy. Each congregation can determine those matters as seems fitting to it. When we are considering oneness in faith, uniformity in ceremonies dare not be considered a factor. In general, all so-called adiophora, those things that are neither commanded nor forbidden in God's Word, dare not be reckoned as belonging to the essence of oneness in faith. Uniformity in ceremonies is not a matter of indifference under all circumstances and in every case, but it is totally a matter of indifference with respect to a complete oneness of faith. All congregations which have the same doctrine are one even though they have different ceremonies. Conversely, congregations may be outwardly as identical as soldiers in uniform, but if they are not one in faith and in doctrine, then the oneness is an illusion. In short, uniformity in ceremonies and organization is not a matter of indifference under all circumstances and in every case but such uniformity is completely a matter of indifference with reference to the essence of unity in faith.

This is also stated in the Augsburg Confession, Article VII: "For it is sufficient for the true unity of the Christian church that the Gospel be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it and that the sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine Word. It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that ceremonies, instituted by men, should be observed uniformly in all places."

To be sure, our Confession also points out that uniformity in certain ceremonies is not a matter of complete indifference in other situations. For example, if we have certain ceremonies in common with the old church, we are somewhat acknowledging in an outward way our connection with that church. However, our Confession adds that this uniformity in outward procedures cannot come into consideration when we are dealing with the essence of Christian unity. The Apology (Articles VII and VIII) states: "But as the different length of day and night does not harm the unity of the church, so we believe that the true unity of the church is not harmed by differences in rites instituted by men, although we like it when universal rites are observed for the sake of tranquillity (propter tranquillitatem). So in our churches we willingly

observe the order of the Mass, the Lord's day, and the other more important feast days. With a very thankful spirit we cherish the useful and ancient ordinances, especially when they contain a discipline that serves to educate and instruct the people and the inexperienced. Now, we are not discussing whether it is profitable to observe them for the sake of tranquillity or bodily profit (propter tranquillitatem aut corporalem utilitatem). Another issue is involved. The question is whether the observance of human traditions is an act of worship necessary for righteousness before God" (and we might add for our purposes that the question also is whether churches can be one without such ordinances). "This must be settled in this controversy, and only then can we decide whether it is necessary for the true unity of the church that human traditions be alike everywhere."

We might add that it sometimes happens, as Christians move from one congregation to another, that they do not feel at home because of different ceremonies. It is desirable for the sake of such weak people that the ceremonies in the same fellowship should be as uniform as possible. At the same time, such people should be instructed and shown that doctrine determines Christian fellowship and not ceremonies, organizations, or even synods. It can become dangerous when we fail to direct people away from adiaphora and to God's Word. This should be the case: We should not feel at home in another church when we find familiar ceremonies but a different doctrine. On the other hand, where we find other ceremonies but the same doctrine and the pure Gospel, there we should feel at home, for there is Christ. Where God's Word is preached purely and cleanly there we hear Christ's voice.

We understand unity of faith to be actual agreement in doctrine. There are people, also so-called Lutherans, who speak thus: We agree with you in everything regarding which you require agreement. We accept the Augustana not only in general or "in essence," or the "chief articles;" rather, we accept without reservation the entire Confessions of the Lutheran Church. So why do you deny us church recognition? Do you demand more than that? Answer: We require no more than agreement in all articles of doctrine. But we do require agreement, not merely words which say that there is agreement; we require agreement itself. When we note that you speak of agreement in the truth but do not have it, then we cannot view you as people who stand in the God-desired oneness of faith simply on the basis of your word while the reality itself is missing. Your words regarding unity are false when you tolerate people among you who believe and teach otherwise than is taught in God's Word and is acknowledged in the Confession of the church. First be concerned that what you say is the truth; only then are we truly one.

When the thesis states, "By unity of faith we understand agreement in all articles of Christian doctrine revealed in Holy Scripture" we are not speaking of a knowledge of the entire Holy Scripture. It is possible that someone might know only the New Testament and yet be in complete agreement with us in faith. Why? Because all articles of Christian doctrine are revealed in the New Testament. Therefore, he stands with us in true unity of faith even though he has taken his knowledge of Christian doctrine only from the New Testament. He would have the right picture of God who saves us in Christ Jesus. We must therefore distinguish between oneness in faith and the extent of one's knowledge of the Word of God. A person can be one with us in faith and yet lack knowledge of much that is in God's Word. Many doctrines are revealed in hundreds of

passages but a person is already in agreement with us if he has drawn the correct doctrine from only one of the pertinent passages. One may also differ with us in his interpretation of this or that passage, but if his interpretation is otherwise in agreement with the faith he can be one with us.

It is an entirely different matter when someone knows a portion of Holy Scripture but at the same time denies it. For example, when someone denies that Balaam's ass spoke, he thereby shows that he overthrows the authority of Scripture and does not accept any article of the Christian faith because it is revealed in Scripture. There can be here no talk of unity of faith with Christendom.

In the thesis does the word "agreement" include that confidence without which faith is not true faith? Would there be agreement simply by approval (assensus)? Answer: When we speak of the unity of faith which is further defined as "agreement in all articles of Christian doctrine," we understand "faith" to be the faith worked by the Holy Spirit. This includes also confidence. There can never be just one part of the subjective faith which is worked by the Holy Ghost. He who possesses knowledge also possesses assent and confidence. The division of faith into notitia, assensus and fiducia is only an abstract one. In practice one part does not stand alone. Thus in thesis I fiducia is also included. When there is merely an outward and historical knowledge of the articles of Christian doctrine, there can be neither Christian faith nor agreement with others in it.

THESIS II

This oneness in faith is possible because all articles of Christian doctrine are clearly revealed in Holy Scripture.

It is an amazing phenomenon within Christendom that the possibility of agreement in all articles of doctrine is being questioned. In connection with the efforts toward union, which at the present time are again being urged, it is said openly that agreement and union on the basis of doctrine are impossible. With reference to doctrine, it is claimed that agreement can be required only in certain main articles; aside from that, we must be content with a so-called organic unity, a unity in church organization, in the form of church services, etc. It is claimed that we are pursuing a will-of-the-wisp in requiring unity of doctrine. To be sure, not all speak so openly. But the basic thought that a oneness in doctrine is impossible underlies all efforts at union which have unity of faith as their goal but nevertheless want to unite only in externals.

We maintain the opposite. We agree that unity would be impossible if we were dealing with agreement in obscure human opinions or in difficult philosophical problems. But we are dealing here with agreement in the articles of doctrine which have been revealed by God Himself in the Holy Scripture. How is this doctrine revealed? Not in an obscure and unintelligible manner. It does not require a great deal of human skill to understand the revealed truth. This requires only a simple faith in God's Word. He who believes the Word of Scripture has the truth. We are not faced with a situation in which there are only obscure hints and suggestions regarding the truths of faith in God's

Word out of which we need to construct the actual articles of faith by means of our own wisdom and skill. It is not a matter of God in His revelation saying A and then leaving it up to human wisdom to say B and C and thus to complete the alphabet of Christian doctrine. To the contrary, all articles of Christian doctrine stand revealed in Scripture in clear words. In Holy Scripture, God has spelled out the entire A B C's of Christian doctrine. All that is required is the acceptance of what has been revealed, a repeating of what has been spelled out, a simple faith. Holy Scripture is clear and plain for all Christians, not only for pastors. All articles of doctrine are revealed in such passages of Scripture to which the learned and the unlearned have equal access. That is just as sure as the Scripture's statement regarding itself that it is a light for all Christians (2 Pet. 1:19), a Word which makes wise the simple (Psalm 19:9), which even children are able to understand (2 Tim. 3:15), and so reliable that all Christians are to test by this Word of Scripture all doctrines offered to them. God's purpose in Scripture is not to offer or to present riddles, but to reveal salvation to all mankind. He who denies the possibility of oneness in faith must also deny that the Holy Scripture is clear. As surely as the entire Christian faith is clearly revealed in Scripture, so sure is the possibility of unity in faith.

But unity of faith is not only possible, it is also actual. God has made it possible through His clear and at the same time powerful Word. One example of this is the Lutheran Church. We Lutherans--this we know for sure--have the entire doctrine of salvation revealed in Holy Scripture and therefore are one in faith. Not only the pastors but also the so-called laity stand in this unity. This is just as sure as it is sure that they, for example, know and believe our Small Catechism.

To be sure, such talk is offensive in our day. Only "opinions" regarding Christian doctrine are to be allowed. No Christian fellowship is supposed to say that it assuredly has the entire and full truth. The Christian truth should be divided among the various fellowships--one has more, another has less, but none may glory in its possession of the total and full truth. Yes, doubt regarding the truth and a heathenish search for it has become fashionable and masquerades as a Christian virtue. It even happens that pure doctrine is ridiculed in groups that bear the name "Lutheran." We are charged with a tendency toward papal infallibility when we claim that we have the truth in all articles of Christian doctrine and therefore stand in full unity of faith. But this charge is based either on great ignorance or malice. The Pope claims infallibility for his own person independent of, aside from, yes, even in opposition to God's Word. We, however, concede that we personally can err. In fact, we agree that with our own ability we can only err in spiritual matters. But in doctrine we do not err but rather are infallible insofar as and because we stand on God's Word as it reads. We speak as God's Word speaks. In all doctrines we need only repeat what God has clearly spelled out for us; that is our only skill. The Lutheran Church claims to possess the total truth only because it accepts the total Word of God as it reads.

That our sinful nature continues to cling to us does not militate against what has been said. Despite the fact that we are still sinners, our doctrine is correct and is godly truth. Our teaching consists precisely in this that we repeat what God has said. That which is revealed in Scripture does not

go through some sort of process involving additions by us so that what is taught by us is half divine and half human, half true and half false. Rather, when things are right with the preachers by God's grace, they are simply the mouth of God. They do not present their own ideas but rather the thoughts of God clearly revealed in Scripture. A preacher should be able to say, "What I have told you is God's truth." Luther reminds us that he who cannot say that should let preaching alone. We dare not confuse fallibility in life with fallibility in doctrine. The latter does not follow from the former, for the clarity of Holy Scripture has been taken out of our hands. All uncertainty and all error in matters of Christian doctrine take place because the clear Word of God is laid aside and because of an unwillingness to repeat what the Word of God says. One follows the traditions of the church or human reason or his preconceived notions and thus allows himself to be turned aside from God's revelation in Scripture. It is a massive self-deception for a person to say, "One certainly cannot derive all articles of Christian doctrine from the Scripture." The problem lies not in God's Word but rather in man who turns against God's Word. The false teachers simply do not want to believe what God's Word says. Their error and their uncertainty flow from their lack of faith in the Word of God. Their position is identified by the saying, "I hear the message but I lack the faith."

God's Word is so constructed that man not only can derive the correct doctrine from it but also that he will do so, provided he remains with the Word. If someone wishes to err, he first of all has to discard the clear Word of Scripture and becloud its meaning with human opinion. Unfortunately, in Christendom that faith has largely been lost which considers Holy Scripture a light and a clear revelation of all articles of faith.

Viewed another way, it might be said that he who follows Holy Scripture cannot err; he cannot escape finding the right path. That is true because the doctrine of Scripture is one. It never occurs that one doctrine of Scripture contradicts another. No truth of Scripture has ever experienced change. False scholarship insists that it has discovered that the Bible contains various concepts, various directions, which conflict with each other. That is a lie of the devil. For if that were true, then unity of faith would be impossible. Such two-fold or multiple contradiction is not in Scriptures. He who gives heed to Paul heeds also Peter and John; he gives heed to the Holy Spirit. He who listens to the Holy Spirit attains a oneness of faith. The minute we interject our own wisdom, the oneness ceases. History corroborates this. When human reason wants to establish theology, unity is replaced by a Babylonian confusion in which one does not understand another and often does not even understand himself. A teacher talks this way on one day and another way on the next day. We can achieve unity in faith and remain therein only when all take the same position according to which they say, "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth," a position in which only that is said, taught, believed, and confessed which God speaks. God has been very good to us. He has given us His truth and has preserved us from false reasoning. For that reason we are one in faith.

In an effort to refute this thesis, 1 Cor. 13:9 has been cited, "We know in part, and we prophesy in part." It is claimed that we can never maintain that we have the truth; that here we should not forget Christian humility. Also cited is the "fact" that even the apostles did not always agree with one another. Also it is claimed that down through the centuries it has always been clear that agreement is not possible in Christendom.

Answers to these objections have already been given. In 1 Cor: 13:9ff., Paul is comparing knowledge in this world with knowledge in eternity; he is not distinguishing between having truth and not having truth. And in the early church when differences arose, we do not hear them saying "No harm done! Outward union is after all the main thing; we can never hope to be one." To the contrary, they met and they discussed until they became one.

THESIS III

God desires this unity of faith because He both commands acceptance in faith of His entire revelation and stoutly forbids every deviation therefrom.

There is no scarcity of those who insist that it is not in keeping with the will of God to press for a full unity of faith. Even within the Lutheran Church conflict regarding some doctrines and the absence of oneness have been pictured as something good, namely, as a mark of an active spiritual life. The attitude is quite general in our day that various lines of direction in the church are warranted. Quite recently this view was enunciated by a publication Trowel and Sword within the General Council. Among other things it stated, "We do not contend against any other denomination as such." And again, "We see in the existing variety of churches on earth the incomprehensible wisdom and the gracious kindness of God who takes into consideration not only the personal traits of individuals but also the national characteristics of entire nations in His plan of development, in His will for redemption, and in the work of His offer of salvation." That the Reformed and Papists are found alongside Lutherans--for the former are specifically included under "other denominations"; that, accordingly, there is disunity in doctrine; yes, even worse, that the Reformed and Papists deviate frequently from the truth--all this is ascribed to the "incomprehensible wisdom of God"!

When we look at Christendom, we see very little effort to foster unity of faith. For example, in the reports regarding the German church meetings it is conceded that there is no agreement in doctrine; moreover, there is no serious effort to reach the goal of becoming one in doctrine. The conferences deal mainly with external matters, seldom with doctrine, and even then the attitude is not that oneness in doctrine must be achieved and that all doctrine contrary to the Word of God must be eliminated.

But it is God's will that all Christians should be one in faith, one in such a way that they are in agreement regarding all articles of Christian faith as stated in Thesis I. It is completely incomprehensible that people who profess to believe Holy Scripture can speak of various and equally valid directions in the church. We could speak of the equal validity of various lines of direction only if God allowed us to depart from His Word and either offered the preachers dispensation from preaching His Word purely and plainly or at least freed the hearers from believing everything that was preached to them from God's Word. But neither one is the case. Rather, every preacher should preach only God's Word without any admixture of human opinion. Jeremiah 23:28, "Let the prophet who has a dream tell his dream, but let the one who has My Word speak it faithfully. For what has straw to do with grain? declares the Lord." 1 Pet. 4:11 speaks of that which shall be proclaimed in the church of God: "If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God." Every preacher shall proclaim not merely portions of God's Word but all of it, as Paul says of himself in Acts 20:27, "For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole

will of God." The preacher shall not add to or subtract from the Word which God has given him (Deut. 12:32; Rev. 22:18-19). Matt. 5:19 has this earnest warning, "Any one who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven." As for the hearers, they are commanded to accept the entire preached and read Word of God. Jesus spoke reprovably to the Emmaus disciples (Luke 24:25), "How foolish you are and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!" When preachers take it upon themselves to deviate from the Word of God, then the hearers should depart from them. Romans 16:17, "I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them." To repeat, it is truly inconceivable that people who profess to believe Holy Scripture can still talk about a variety of equally valid directions in the church. Only one course is admissible according to Scripture, namely, that which accepts all of God's Word without adding to it or subtracting from it. As surely as God wants in the church only the one doctrine revealed by Him, just so surely does He want this one "direction" in the church. That there are "denominations" stems not from God's incomprehensible wisdom but from sin, from the folly of man, from the unbelief that does not want to accept God's Word. That there are Reformed and Papists is not by God's will nor by His doing, but rather is permitted by God as He permits other sins. The character of the church which God desires is agreement in all articles of Christian doctrine, true acceptance thereof. As surely as it is God's will that people accept His entire Word and as surely as the Lutheran Church accepts that entire Word, so sure it is that all people should be Lutherans. For example, when we on the basis of God's Word say, "God alone works conversion," it is not God's will that the Ohioans at the same time say that in a certain respect conversion and salvation depend also on human beings and not alone on God. Again, when we on the basis of Scripture say of the Lord's Supper, "It is the true body and blood of Christ," it is not the will of God that the Reformed, at the same time, insist that it is not Christ's body and blood but that the body and blood of Christ are merely symbolized by the bread and wine.

God specifically commands oneness of doctrine which He presents to faith. 1 Cor. 1:10, "I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought." This states as clearly as possible that according to God's will all Christians should be fully one in faith. Among Christians varying opinions should not be held and presented; rather, all should speak the same thing in the same mind and with the same meaning. Among Christians, scattered as they are throughout the world, there can and must be variety. They vary in their languages and customs. Their church services, as far as outward matters are concerned, may be completely different. But in one thing there should be no diversity, but rather total agreement. All Christians in the entire world should be one in doctrine.

Eph. 4:3-6, "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit--just as you were called to one hope when you were called--one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all." The apostle here admonishes that the Spirit-worked unity should be preserved. He bases his admonition on a reference to the fundamental items which constitute the unity. Through the working of the Holy Spirit, Christians form one spiritual body;

just as they have one hope of eternal life, they have also one Lord, one faith, one baptism. The God-desired spiritual fellowship is therefore only present among Christians when they all have the same one faith, the same Word and sacrament.

Eph. 4:13-14, "Until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining the full measure of perfection found in Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming." According to the context the apostle here indicates what should be achieved among Christians and states that the ascended Lord has given to His church apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. The result should be that all Christians have the same faith and understanding, not allowing themselves to be moved like children by every wind of false doctrine but rather to stand firm as men on one and the same revealed doctrine.

Another passage worth noting is 1 Thess. 3:10, "Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith." Paul had been in Thessalonica only briefly. Persecutions by the Jews had forced him to leave the city. As a result a lack of understanding on the part of the Thessalonians soon became apparent. They did not have a correct grasp of many articles of the Christian faith. Now that the apostle writes to them, he does not say, "It makes little difference whether you have the correct understanding in all doctrinal matters or whether you err in this or that article." No, the apostle prays that God may give him the opportunity through further personal instruction to supply what was lacking in the faith of the Thessalonians.

In John 8:31 the Lord says, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples." John 10:27, "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me." Verse 5, "But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice." In these and similar passages the Lord states what should be the case among disciples of Christ, namely, they adhere to Christ's words, they hear Christ's voice so exclusively that they flee from a stranger and turn away from everything that is not Christ's voice. Thereby it is declared that in Christendom there should be only one doctrine and one faith.

To be sure, 1 Cor. 11:19 states, "No doubt there have to be differences among you." But the apostle does not continue "That is all right" or "Therefore tolerate the false teachers." Instead, he adds, "to show which of you have God's approval." In his just judgment God allows haireseis (that is, the divisions or parties to arise). He does so not in order that there might be different directions in the church but rather that it might become apparent who holds to the right direction established by God's Word. "The earth has room for all" -- that is true and holds true also for the church in this respect that the church does not have the assignment to remove anyone from the earth, to take his life. But the church does not have "room for all." Instead, God commands, "Expel the wicked man from your number" (1 Cor. 5:13). Regarding doctrine, the Word is, "Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him" (Titus 3:10), "Keep away from them" (Romans 16:17).

The will of God, with regard to the unity of faith, can be noted especially also in the high priestly prayer of Christ, John 17:11, "Holy Father, protect them by the power of Your name--the name you gave me--so that they may be one as we are one." Verse 17, "Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth." Verses 20-23, "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be with us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity." Our Savior here prays for the complete oneness of his disciples, but it is a unity which has its basis in God's name, God's truth, God's Word, etc., in other words, for a complete unity of faith.

In the presentation thus far, it has been fully demonstrated that the unity defined in Thesis I is that which is desired by God. Therefore, it is amazing that the unionists, in support of their wrong position, cite the key passage which deals with unity of faith, Eph. 4:3ff. They say, "After all, the passage says, 'make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace,' Therefore it is God's will that we should not contend so strenuously regarding doctrine but rather should promote peace. You ought to extend the hand of brotherhood in love also to those with whom you do not agree." To be sure, there is a bond of peace which encircles the Christian church and that is love which should always be active in Christendom. But active in what way? In such a manner that "through the bond of peace" various people are bound together outwardly? No, rather love should be active in such a way that we seek to "keep the unity of the Spirit." If this passage were to support the unionists, it would necessarily read, "Make every effort to keep the multiplicity of the Spirit."

God's Word also says that we should not allow ourselves to be lured away in any manner from the true unity. That is clear from a comparison of Rom. 10:1-2 with Rom. 11:28. It is often said, "Why do you not wish, in love, to be one with these people? You can see that these people are very earnest; they are truly zealous about God and Christ. Isn't it a shame to withhold the hand of fellowship because they err in this or that article?" In Rom. 10 Paul says regarding the Jews, "Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God," and he then adds, "but their zeal is not based on knowledge." The better Jews sincerely believed that they had the truth. But does Paul for that reason extend to them the hand of fellowship? No, for even though he loves them dearly and prays for them earnestly, he yet states in chapter 11, "as far as the Gospel is concerned, they are enemies."

In connection with Thesis III there are still several objections presented by the opponents of true unity which need clarification.

The unionists say that love should be allowed to come into play, but that this can happen only in the absence of a rigid approach to all articles of doctrine. We reply: What a strange sort of love that would be which places us in glaring opposition to God's Word! It is God's will that we believe and accept all that stands written and that we do not disregard the smallest commandment. However,

this "love" which is urged upon us would cause us to depart from God's Word and therefore would involve a disregard for the majesty of God. That is a caricature of love. As a matter of fact, the love-filled unionists basically love neither God nor man. They do not love God, for the Lord says, John 14:23, "If any one loves me, he will obey my teaching." They do not love their neighbor, for error in faith and departure from God's Word is never a matter of indifference; it is always dangerous to the soul. Peculiar indeed is the unionistic methodology which says, "This or that undoubtedly is taught in Scripture, but it is not necessary to hold to it so closely." This is thoroughly dangerous and causes the entire Word of God to totter.

The unionists cite 1 Cor. 3:12-15, "If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames." It is true that the apostle here states that in the church some build with the wood, hay and straw of erring human opinions on the correct foundation with the result that the builders may yet be saved. But he does not say that wood, hay and straw are to be permitted in the church or are desired by God. To the contrary, it is stated that wood, hay and straw have no permanence but rather will be consumed by the fire. All that can be proved from this text is that one may be saved despite his erring opinions as long as he holds to the foundation, Christ, and lets his own worthless work be consumed in the fire of tribulation.

The unionists call our attention to the passages which exhort us to bear with the weak, for example, Rom. 15:1, "We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak." It is certainly God's will that we bear with the weak, also with those who are weak in doctrine. But this bearing with the weak means that they should not be cast aside in a loveless manner and be declared non-Christians. Rather, in love and patience they should be instructed out of God's Word but not in such a way that their error is explained either as the truth or as a matter of indifference. That would merely confuse further the already confused consciences. Let us heed the Scripture! In Scripture we are often encouraged to bear with the weak. But it is never said that we should tolerate those who err in doctrine. To the contrary, it states, "A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough." Applied specifically to the erring fellowships, this means that they stand before us not as weak fellowships but rather as fellowships which err against the clear testimony of the truth and therefore have separated themselves from the true church.

Finally it is said that the requirement for agreement in all articles of doctrine cannot be according to God's will since the splintering of the church is the inescapable result of such a requirement. Our answer is that the outward splintering of the church is certainly not the fault of those who, in accordance with God's command, make the entire Word of God valid, but rather it is the fault of those who, contrary to God's command, do not wish to accept this Word. The accusation that those who stress acceptance of all Scriptural doctrine are disturbers of the peace is just as unreasonable as is the case when our anarchists complain that those are disturbing the peace who do not allow them to transgress the law at their own discretion. In the church of God the word is, "To the law and to the testimony," that is,

to the revealed Word of God. God's Word is the law of the land for the Christian church. And those are the authors of the divisions who do not allow the law of the land to have full sway but rather want to overthrow it at least in some articles. Whom does God's Word call the disturbers of the peace? Not those who hold to the Word, but rather those who do not abide by the revealed doctrine. Rom. 16:17, "I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way, contrary to the teachings you have learned." Therefore, according to Scripture, those who foster other than the pure doctrine of the Word of God are those that cause divisions and offenses in the church.

In conclusion, it might be well to note some pertinent words of Luther in which he emphasizes that the church, being not the Lord but the steward of the Word of God, cannot sell it short or declare it to be a matter of indifference. Luther: "The doctrine is not ours, but it is God's who has called us to be only its servants; therefore we should not and we cannot negotiate or neglect the smallest tittle or letter" (On Galatians 5:9).

In addition, Luther insists strongly that a yielding on God's Word dare not be demanded in the name of love. He writes: "We are surely prepared to observe peace and love with all men, provided that they leave the doctrine of faith perfect and sound for us. If we cannot obtain this, it is useless for them to demand love from us. A curse on a love that is observed at the expense of the doctrine of faith, to which everything must yield--love, an apostle, an angel from heaven, etc.! Therefore when they minimize this issue in such a dishonest way, they give ample evidence of how highly they regard the majesty of the Word. If they believed that it is the Word of God, they would not play around with it this way. No, they would treat it with the utmost respect; they would put their faith in it without any disputing or doubting; and they would know that one Word of God is all and that all are one, that one doctrine is all doctrines and all are one, so that when one is lost all are eventually lost, because they belong together and are held together by a common bond.

Therefore let us leave the praise of harmony and of Christian love to them. We, on the other hand, praise faith and the majesty of the Word. Love can sometimes be neglected without danger, but the Word and faith cannot. It belongs to love to bear everything and to yield to everyone. On the other hand, it belongs to faith to bear nothing whatever and to yield to no one. Love yields freely, believes, condones, and tolerates everything. Therefore it is often deceived. Yet when it is deceived, it does not suffer any hardship that can really be called a hardship; that is, it does not lose Christ, and therefore it is not offended but keeps its constancy in doing good even toward those who are unthankful and unworthy. In the issue of salvation, on the other hand, when fanatics teach lies and errors under the guise of truth and make an impression on many, there love is certainly not to be exercised, and error is not to be approved. For what is lost here is not merely a good deed done for someone who is unthankful, but the Word, faith, Christ, and eternal life. Therefore if you deny God in one article of faith, you have denied Him in all; for God is not divided into many articles of faith, but He is everything in each article and He is one in all the articles of faith. Therefore when the Sacramentarians accuse us of neglecting love, we continually reply to them with this proverb of Paul's: 'A little yeast, etc.'

Finally, at this point we should discuss the question why we deny sacramental fellowship to a Reformed whom we in love acknowledge as a Christian? We have various items against such a Christian in the Reformed fellowship which must be resolved according to God's Word before we can receive him to the sacrament. First of all, he does not have the correct doctrine concerning the Holy Supper; he cannot discern the Lord's Body as required by the Apostle in 1 Cor. 11:29. Already for that reason we cannot receive him at our sacrament. But let us assume for the moment that he personally is one with us in the doctrine of the Lord's Supper. Then we still have another problem. He is in an opposing camp which continually drops bombs on the camp of the orthodox church. The Reformed fellowship as such is at war with the orthodox church contrary to God's will; in several articles it is in rebellion against God as He has revealed Himself in His Word. For this reason we must say to this Christian: "You, dear sir, are in a foreign camp and therefore at odds with the church of God here on earth. First you must give up this position and then you can join us at communion." We do not permit at the Lord's Supper one who is unreconciled with his brother or who has given public offense in the congregation. By the same token we cannot receive one who gives offense by his membership in the Reformed fellowship which teaches errors and opposes the truth. We should deal in the same way with weak Lutherans, for example, those in the General Council. Certainly within the General Council there are individuals and also congregations who are one with us in faith. And yet we cannot practice with them a fellowship of brethren in the faith because the body to which they belong has not spoken clearly in all matters that require a public pronouncement. But it should be our goal to arrive at a full unity, unity in the truth, also with this fellowship. It is a unionistic error to assume that a brotherly unity in faith can be achieved by covering up the lack of unity.

THESIS V

Those who stand in the unity of faith, recognizing this unity as a glorious blessing of God's grace, should diligently seek to nurture and preserve it.

It is something exceedingly wonderful to stand in the fellowship which, in accordance with the will of God, accepts the entire Word of God and confesses all articles of the faith revealed in Holy Scripture. God's revealed Word is God's name, God's honor. Therefore, where the total Word is accepted, there God receives full honor. Contrariwise, viewed correctly, it is appalling to err in some articles of Christian doctrine even in weakness and in this weakness to strengthen the fellowship of those who deny portions of godly truth and even label them as error. It is a terrible thing to stand in the ranks of those who oppose, attack and even persecute those who confess God's truth even if it is done out of ignorance. St. Paul is one example. Even though Paul had persecuted the confessors of Christian truth in ignorance, yet, when he had come to a realization thereof, this so pained him that he said: "For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God" (1 Cor. 15:9). Therefore, the Christians in erring fellowships are to be pitied as they in ignorance take a position contrary to the godly truth. Every Christian in the orthodox church should thank God that He has guided him into this fellowship and he should daily pray God that He may uphold him in this fellowship and not allow him to stray into the fellowship of those who deny portions of the revealed truth of God.

Therefore, we grant that people may be saved also in erring fellowships, not insofar as God's Word is falsified and denied there, but insofar as basic articles of God's truth are still taught and the Holy Spirit in mercy preserves them so that the accompanying errors that are preached do not drive out faith. All false doctrine deadens, destroys and hinders spiritual life. Every fellowship, insofar as it proclaims false doctrine, is a corrupt sect. For example, how tormented are some Methodist Christians by the false Methodist teaching regarding the marks of the state of grace! It is completely different in the orthodox church. Here people receive help on the way to Life with respect to church fellowship. Here the Law is preached in all its severity, and souls are properly humbled. But also here wounded hearts are again lifted up and are filled with unchanging comfort as the Gospel is purely proclaimed regarding the universal and free grace of God in Christ. Here souls are not directed to their own worthiness but rather to the grace of God which Christ has purchased for all sinners and which He now offers to all sinners through the means of grace, so that only faith is necessary to possess grace and salvation and to be certain of the state of grace. Therefore, only in the orthodox church are souls cared for as God would have them cared for.

Furthermore, when all false doctrine and every deviation from God's Word is zealously denounced in the orthodox church, souls are preserved in a proper respect for God's Word so that they firmly hold to the Word of God for the hour of temptation and death. He who handles God's Word carelessly might well wonder whether in the evil day the devil might not cause him to doubt even this Word: "The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin." The devil can then whisper to him: Since you have surrendered other words of Scripture, how do you know that this word is valid?

We stand in a fellowship which holds fast the entire Word of God, the entire revelation, a fellowship in which souls are properly cared for and in which God is given the honor which is due Him. What a blessing we share! We cannot sufficiently praise it.

This blessing is granted to us through the free grace of God. In the Kingdom of God only grace avails. Therefore, we have not brought ourselves to the one true faith. Also here the Word applies: "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy." And again: "It does not, therefore, depend on men's desire or effort, but on God's mercy."

It is God who has given us understanding so that we do not swim with the unionistic stream of the day but rather hold the entire Word of God in high esteem and accept it in faith. It is God who has given us understanding so that we are not caused to vacillate by the unionistic talk about love and peace, but rather that we know that the first article of love to God and men is this that we firmly hold to and confess the total Word of God.

It is also essential that this great blessing be nurtured and preserved. God's Word specifically requires this. Eph. 4:3, "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." In this passage two things are said: (1) What we should "keep" and (2) how this keeping is to be achieved. We dare not forget that what we are to keep is the unity in the Spirit, the unity of faith wrought by the Holy Spirit, as the Apostle

later specifically adds, "One faith, one baptism." We dare not allow any other concept of unity to arise among us than the unity of faith which is in harmony with Scripture, the agreement in all articles of Christian doctrine. To be sure, the purposes of the Synodical Conference include "An effort to establish the boundaries of synods according to geographical considerations." But, as we have seen, that is not an essential requirement for expression of an inner unity of faith. The purposes of the synodical conference also include "joint effort for joint goals." We are already cooperatively active in negro missions and in immigrant missions. But what value would there be in an outward establishment of geographical boundaries and in all other external cooperation in church work if the boundaries of our faith were not correctly established according to God's Word and we did not remain one in all articles of doctrine established for us in God's Word? If we in a unionistic fashion wanted to surrender this or that doctrine of the Word of God, if, under the pretext of allowing love to hold sway, we were to allow false doctrines to have citizenship rights among us, then all of our outward standing together and working together would be a caricature of the God-desired unity. The unity of faith is most seriously threatened when indifference to false doctrine moves in. The unity of faith is immediately destroyed when one part adopts and holds fast false doctrine. For this reason we dare not forget what the Constitution says regarding the purpose and goal of the Synodical Conference, namely, "mutual strengthening in faith and confession," "furtherance of unity in doctrine and practice." That takes place when every one is mindful, first of all, with regard to himself that he remains with God's Word in all matters and then also in brotherly love observes whether the doctrine and practice of his brethren in the faith are in harmony with God's Word. We should maintain these outward ties of the Synodical Conference just for this reason that thereby we may strengthen each other in the one true faith. Such a unity of faith as God has entrusted to us is indeed rare in the world. Therefore, we should most earnestly foster it with all God-given means. The following quotation from a sermon by the sainted Dr. Walther is to the point:

"If we wish to preserve this jewel of ours, then every one must work at it in his position and calling and all of our church institutions must help toward that end. You fathers and mothers must already lay the foundation at home and instill in your children early in life pure doctrine and understanding and an inner love for the same together with an aversion for all false doctrine. In your schools you teachers must faithfully further this work begun at home and, where it has not been started, make a beginning thereof with a burning zeal so that you are not hindrances but rather true helpers to the holy ministry. You pastors must not be satisfied just to give what you already have but rather to continue to read and study day and night in order that you may become richer in doctrine and understanding, stronger in refutation of error and more zealous in the work of the Lord. Think for a moment. To stand still here is a step backward; not to grow is to die. We professors in our institutions for the training of servants in school and church must unceasingly give thought to making our institutions genuine schools of the prophets and high beacon lights for the land in which we would gladly see all else

fail, just not the light of the pure doctrine of the apostles and prophets. Even at our prep school we must prepare for this with the highest earnestness. Toward this goal we also must always carefully and zealously make full use of our pastoral conferences and synodical conventions. We must see to it that our publications and whatever printing means are at our disposal are used with ever greater conscientiousness so that our readers are led to seek in our publications not interesting light religious reading but rather nothing else than purity, basics and firmness in doctrine and apologetics (im Lehren und Wehren)--no whoring with the spirit of the times, no amorous ogling of false doctrine, no respect of persons. Our synodical guardians, our presidents, must be concerned not merely with being guardians of human regulations but rather guardians of the purity of doctrine and understanding." (From "Pure Doctrine and Understanding, the Free Gift of God's Grace," a sermon on 1 Corinthians 1:4-5)

If we wish to preserve unity in faith we dare not surrender any article of revealed doctrine. But it is also to be noted that the apostle says in Eph.4:3, "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." The unity of the spirit can only be preserved through the bond of peace. If those who stand in unity of faith are not truly peaceable but quarrelsome, if they do not allow love to govern in everything that does not pertain to faith, then unity of faith will not long remain. Luther: "Where there is no love, doctrine cannot remain pure."

In what way shall love primarily show itself? We should not quarrel over words. This admonition of the apostle is much misused in our day. It is labelled quarreling over words when we wish to hold fast all words of God. In this sense we indeed wish to quarrel about words so that we may someday have this praise from our Savior that we held His Word in high esteem. But we do not wish to fight about things that are not demanded in God's Word and therefore are matters of indifference.

Furthermore, when it becomes necessary for us to be critical of one another, we do not wish to do this in a damaging manner. Faithfulness to God's Word goes very well with loving consideration. When our criticism is marked by love, then it will, by God's grace, be a means whereby unity of faith is preserved. But if we are critical of one another in an injurious and ruthless manner, then our criticism will become a means whereby our unity of faith is destroyed. Church history offers abundant examples of heresies which were promulgated by people who at the start were only personally embittered. Our nature is very evil, and the devil is always determined to profit from that fact. If we have been injured by a brother and our heart has turned from him, we have a tendency to look for and approve those things which he opposes and to oppose what he favors. Thus a basis has already been prepared for false doctrine and for divisions. The Apology says: "Many heresies have arisen from the fact that pastors have become bitter against one another."

Despite all efforts to avoid offenses, they will occur. We all still have our sinful nature. However, when offenses do occur, we should not immediately

meet them with mistrust, but rather, in love put the best construction on everything. In cases of actual offenses which need to be resolved, this should be done in love and in a mutually agreeable manner.

An excellent contribution to the preservation of unity lies in concentrating on the goal to which we as individuals and as synods are dedicated. As in the case of an individual Christian, so also no synod should live to itself but for Christ, that is, to win souls for Christ and His Kingdom. We ought to say: Cursed be every synodical activity which does not have this sole purpose in mind, to save souls.

In Col. 3:14 the apostle Paul says, "Love which binds them altogether in perfect unity." The Apology comments as follows: "So he is talking not about personal perfection but about fellowship in the church. He says that love is a bond and unbroken chain linking the many members of the church with one another. Similarly, in all families and communities harmony should be nurtured by mutual aid, for it is not possible to preserve tranquility unless men cover and forgive certain mistakes in their midst. In the same way Paul commands that there be love in the church to preserve harmony, to bear, if need be, with the crude behavior of the brethren, to cover up minor mistakes, lest the church disintegrate into various schisms and the hatreds, factions, and heresies that arise from such schisms.

For harmony will inevitably disintegrate if bishops impose heavy burdens on the people or have no regard for their weakness. Dissensions also arise when the people judge their clergy's behavior too strictly or despise them because of some minor fault and then seek after some other kinds of doctrine and other clergy. On the other hand, perfection (that is, the integrity of the church) is preserved when the strong bear with the weak, when the people put the best construction on the faults of their clergy, when the bishops take into account the weakness of the people. All the books of the sages are full of these commands of fairness, that in everyday life we should put up with many things for the sake of mutual peace." (Tappert, pp. 139-140)

Gerhard says: "It is godless to pronounce a true believer a false teacher because he has expressed himself unsatisfactorily in one matter of doctrine."

The Formula of Concord states: "May the Almighty God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ grant us the grace of his Holy Spirit that we may all be of one heart in him and constantly abide in this Christian and God-pleasing concord. Amen." (Tappert, p. 497)